

February 3, 1993

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
FCC MAIL ROOM

The Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Rule-making for cable TV

Dear FCC Officials:

Thank heavens the machinery is being created to reregulate cable TV companies and help protect the public from the abuses by these greedy, insensitive outfits.

I am a captive of Cable Satellite, Inc., the company licensed by the City of South Miami, Florida. I know of no aspect of this cable TV firm's performance that measures up to acceptable business standards. Its subscribers have been sorely mistreated and abused in every imaginable way.

Indeed, Cable Satellite may be a classic "case study" of why the need to reregulate the cable TV industry is so urgent. In its protected monopolistic status, without regulation or competition, it has demonstrated how rotten a company can behave if unfettered.

I have not dealt with ANY company as greedy, unresponsive and unprincipled as this cable TV company. A few samples of its behavior:

- My monthly bill for cable TV was \$12.00 just three years ago. Today, it has zoomed to nearly \$40.00 per month!
- The company is unresponsive to customers' questions and complaints. Even the officers of the company refuse to answer legitimate questions about billing errors and company policies.
- Billing errors are common. No apologies are ever offered.
- Almost impossible to get anything but busy signals when trying to phone about service problems.
- No provisions for emergency service after-hours and on weekends, naturally, when service interruptions seem to occur most often.
- Appointment dates/times for repairs are rarely honored.
- Company representative are brusque at best, rude at worst.
- Communications with customers stink. Rates change, new items appear on bills, programming changes occur without notification or comment by the company.

I am enclosing a few samples of letters I have written to Cable Satellite as exhibits of poor performance and behavior by this firm, which, sadly, may be all too typical of cable TV companies.

Apparently, it will require regulation to make cable companies provide reasonable levels of service at reasonable rates; treat subscribers with courtesy and fairness; and conduct business in a prompt, accurate and professional manner.

That's not too much to ask. Please do it. Thank you.

10-11-93
LORY SNIPES

Sincerely,

Lory John Snipes

October 4, 1991

Mr. Charles A. Hermanowski, President
Americable/Cable Satellite Inc.
10705 S.W. 216 St. D-202
Miami, FL 33170

Dear Mr. Hermanowski:

Cable Satellite must have a "corporate policy" of not responding to customer inquiries -- as shameful and incompressible as that may seem.

That's the only conclusion I can draw based on your failure to respond to the three letters I have written to you in recent months.

Those letters contained sincere questions about: 1) the new "copyright fee" on the bill, 2) errors in my bill, 3) erratic changes in the sales tax and franchise fee charges, 4) and why Cable Satellite's basic rates have more than doubled in less than two years.

I directed my questions to you, the top officer in the company, because previous letters to your vice president had gone unanswered. I now understand why I should not have been surprised by your subordinates' refusal to respond to my written questions.

I finally had to resort to the County Consumer Services Dept. to get some answers. I learned that the "copyright fee" is an operating expense, normally included in the cost of basic service. In Cable Satellite's case, it is shown as a separate item on the bill -- but is really another rate increase.

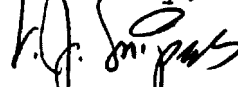
I still don't have an understanding of why your rates have ballooned 120 percent in 21 months. But I have collected some unflattering theories.

As to the errors in my bill and the erratic tax and fee charges, I learned these were just flat-out errors by Cable Satellite. Even on these matters, I never received the courtesy of a reply or an apology.

The September issue of Consumer Reports takes cable-TV to task for its poor service, noting that "readers' assessment of their cable company was the lowest we've seen in 16 years of rating services." The survey pointed up customers' high level of frustration in trying to get information from cable companies. I felt as if I were reading directly about Cable Satellite.

In the article, Rep. John Dingell (D., Mich.) posed this question about cable-TV: "In what other service industry does a commercial enterprise need to be forced to answer the telephone?" He could have added, "... or to respond to a customer's letter."

Sincerely,


L.J. Snipes

cc: public officials

August 21, 1991

Ms. Cathy Grimes
Consumer Services Department
Office of Cable Television Coordination
Room 901
140 West Flagler St.
Miami, FL 33130

Dear Ms. Grimes:

Thanks so much for your letter in response to my questions about Cable Satellite. Also, I very much appreciate your courtesy and thoughtfulness in sending copies of the new cable TV ordinance and the Attorney General's report.

I realize you have a small staff and surely are swamped with complaints and questions from cable TV subscribers. That's why I especially appreciate your reply. Also, as you know, Cable Satellite officers refuse to respond to questions from customers.

In this connection, I think it is disgraceful that Cable Satellite has managed to shift the burden of customer response to your office. Shouldn't the licensee be required to respond to customers? Besides, what ever happened to plain, old, good manners in business. Even the president won't reply.

Maybe it's not so surprising at that, when one considers the company's devious record. They have been unfair and dishonest in their late-charge practices. They have tried to "conceal" a rate increase with the cryptic "copyright fee." They have used two-tier service as a device to increase charges, while dumping the programming dregs into so-called basic service.

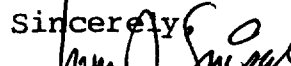
The new cable TV regulations require licensees to notify customers promptly of price changes and that "bills will be clear, concise and understandable." (I would have added, "correct and truthful.") I would argue that Cable Satellite has not lived up to these requirements in the past. Here's hoping for the future.

I regret to burden you further, but I have just a couple of additional questions. Hope you will be good enough to reply.

I see the county manager has audit options if a licensee increases the rate for basic service within a calendar year by more than the greater of 7 percent or the increase in the CPI. How does this "fit" with Cable Satellite, which has increased rates for basic service 120 percent in the past 21 months? And what is the definition for "basic service?" Is it whatever the licensee declares?

Are the cable TV documents filed in your offices -- such as license application, quarterly and annual reports -- available for review by members of the public/cable TV subscribers?

Thank you.

Sincerely,


MR. LORY J SNIPES
6771 SW 62ND TER
MIAMI, FL 33143

April 28, 1990

Mr. Rick Hensley, Vice President
Cable Satellite, Inc.
P.O. Box 859
Miami, FL 33197-0859

Dear Mr. Hensley:

I have your hostile and evasive letter of 4/24/90. It seems symbolic of the type of behavior behind the growing public outcry against the attitudes and actions of cable TV companies.

While you offered no reply at all to my earlier correspondence, your letter itself turned out to be equally unresponsive to my questions. Rather, you accuse me of "harassing" your company -- an astonishing view coming, as it does, from a company that routinely harasses its customers with brutal billing practices and poor customer service.

Despite your contentions, you certainly have not answered my questions about your so-called "late charges," at least not in a way that offers an acceptable degree of clarity or satisfaction.

Why can't I get a straight answer on the rules that govern your late charges? I have fruitlessly tried to find out the latest date I can pay my montly bill without incurring your exorbitant late fee. The answers on the bills and from your representatives cover the spectrum -- the 20th of the month, the 23rd, the 26th ... by the end of the month. Just what IS the answer? I think I -- and all your customers -- deserve a clear explanation of this matter.

As you know, I strongly object to your late-charge practices that seem unreasonable and unfair. You leave customers too little time to pay without penalty and punish them with a late charge that is too high. Your only "justification" of this policy to me was your lame explanation that it's required because of "the area's transient population." Yet, other companies serve this same transient population with late-charge policies that are far less punitive.

In any case, it's apparent that you do not wish to submit your late-charge policies to the light of public discussion. Your posture is revealed by your emphatic reminder that TV charges are not regulated in Dade County.

It is true that you operate as an unregulated monopoly without competition and, therefore, your customers are really at your mercy. I should think this "charter" you enjoy would also impose special responsibilities to be fair, open and sensitive in dealing with your customers' complaints and concerns. Based on my own experience, I can only conclude that you feel just the opposite.

How, then, does a customer get a proper hearing or redress of grievances if he can't appeal to regulatory authority and doesn't find a fair sense of responsiveness in a monopoly's management? Regretably, he has no choice but to seek redress through government and in the public arena.

Sincerely,

L. J. Snipes

cc: Metro-Dade, South Miami officials

ENTERTAINMENT by

★ Cable Satellite ★

A Division of

Americable International Inc.

Your Cable/Satellite Connection

"A Changing Lifestyle Activity"

April 24, 1990

Mr. Lory Snipes
6771 SW 62 Terrace
Miami, FL 33143

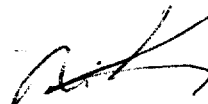
Dear Mr. Snipes:

It is apparent that you wish to continue to harass our company over the charges for late fees. I have personally explained to you the company's policy pertaining to late fees and I know that my Office Manager, Bonnie, has done the same.

It is plain to see that your many items of correspondence that you have sent to us is not for the purpose of obtaining information relating to the late fees, but for argumentative purposes only since we have answered your questions many times.

I will state again that this type of charge has never been regulated and at the present time no cable TV rates are regulated in Dade County. I do not think it is necessary to again explain the company's reasons for this charge and any further correspondence received by us on this matter will be deemed outright harassment.

Sincerely,



Rick Hensley
Vice President - Finance

RH/sjn

LORY J. SNIPES
6771 S.W. 62ND TERRACE
MIAMI, FLORIDA 33143

July 10, 1991

Ms. Kathy Grimes
Consumer Services Dept.
Office of Cable TV Coordination
Room 901
140 West Flagler St.
Miami, FL 33130

Dear Ms. Grimes:

Enclosed is a copy of my letter regarding billing errors by Cable Satellite. It reflects the latest in a litany of errors, abuses and poor service by this cable company.

I'm fed up with Cable Satellite. Never have I dealt with a company that treats its customers in such a callous, greedy and highhanded manner. I assume that they feel they can act this way and get away with it because they are not regulated and do not have competition.

My question to you is this: As the Cable TV arm of Consumer Services, what powers to you have to help the consumer? Does your office have any authority or can you bring any pressure to bear on cable companies that mistreat customers or provide terrible service?

I feel as if I'm constantly harrassed and abused by Cable Satellite. Errors. Brutal billing practices. Huge rate increases that defy justification. Sudden changes in programming and billing schedules without explanation. Refusal to communicate. Refusal to answer questions honestly -- or otherwise.

I can't even find out the explanation for a new "copyright fee" that popped up on my bill. Apparently, not even the president of Cable Satellite will respond to a simple question.

Can you or your offices help with any of this? If not, who should I approach? The Commissioners? The Mayor? The C'ty Manager? The Attorney General?

What is Dade County's position, reaction to recommendations by the state's task force on Cable TV? (See attached article.)

Thanks,

Lory Snipes

July 8, 1991

Mr. Charles A. Hermanowski, President
Americable/Cable Satellite Inc.
10705 S.W. 216 St. #D-202
Miami, FL 33170

Dear Mr. Hermanowski:

I wrote to you on the 20th of last month with some complaints and suggestions about the quality of customer service rendered by Cable Satellite. When my July bill arrived, it contained blatant inaccuracies.

The bill fails to reflect my May payment. (See enclosed copy of my cancelled check.) Instead, it hits me with the onerous and unjust \$5.00 late charge and threatens service disconnection unless payment is "made immediately."

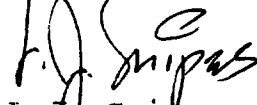
I could not help but wonder if this was my "punishment" for daring to complain about Cable Satellite. Or was it just another blunder to verify the poor quality of service in question. Certainly, it is the latest in a series of billing errors I have experienced with Cable Satellite.

Your representative, Norma Vazquez, said she could find no record of my May payment, and I would have to send a copy of my cancelled check as evidence. That copy is enclosed.

This problem has cost me extra effort and aggravation. I have never received the courtesy of an apology from Cable Satellite for any past errors or impositions but, in this case, I would like an explanation, at least.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



L.J. Snipes
6771 S.W. 62 Terr.
Miami, FL 33143

P.S. - And speaking of explanations, Mr. Hermanowski, I never received an answer to my questions about that new "copy-right fee" on the bill. (What and why is it?) I would appreciate an answer.

cc: City of South Miami officials
Metro-Dade County officials

October 19, 1989

The Readers' Forum
The Miami Herald
1 Herald Plaza
Miami, Fla. 33132-1693

To The Editor:

Your editorial about the "Cable-TV challenge" for long-suffering subscribers really hit home with me.

As a subscriber to Cable Satellite, I have been suffering through poor TV reception, dereliction in restoring service after interruptions, repeated billing errors, inaccessible representatives, poor business manners, and an outrageous "late charge" that, until recently, ran 50 percent of the base bill.

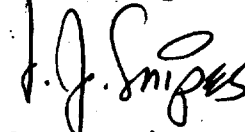
Despite this lousy performance record, the company has announced that its basic service rates will officially double as of Oct. 1. What audacity!

Cable Satellite serves as a case study for the "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude expressed by the Herald.

The cable company seems determined to demonstrate how badly a monopoly can behave when it is constrained by neither competition nor regulation. Certainly, regulated utilities such as FPL and Southern Bell work hard at customer satisfaction.

The cable TV companies must have competition or reregulation -- to assure fairness and decent service for subscribers. It is encouraging that this matter is under review in Washington.

Sincerely,



L.J. Snipes
6771 S.W. 62 Terr.
Miami, FL 33143

Ph. 666-5562